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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, April 3, 1939.

(For Broadcast Use Only)

Subject: "EASTER CHICKS AND JUNE BROILERS." Information from the Bureau of Animal Industry, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Several publications available.

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Easter's only a few days off. Little children are looking forward to their gay Easter baskets filled with colorful dyed eggs, presided over by chocolate hens or rabbits. Some of the children will have furry rabbits and yellow cotton chicks in their baskets, along with the jelly beans and sugar eggs with a picture inside.

Some may receive a live white rabbit as an Easter gift, or some downy little live chicks. I certainly hope these delicate little birds will be hardy enough to stand the excitement and change from snug incubators and brooders. Although, after all, the baby chicks will doubtless be nice broilers by June, or find themselves in the frying pan in July or August. Meditating along these lines, it seemed a coincidence to pick up our Washington correspondent's letter this morning and find that she, too, was thinking about chickens. She writes:

Today I'm following up my recent letter about the general activities of the Bureau of Animal Industry of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. I promised to give you some special points from the sections of poultry husbandry. Both commercial poultrymen and the housewife who has a small home flock benefit from the studies of these sections. Here's a simple example of a recent recommendation. Until lately it was an accepted theory that if scratch feed were scattered into the litter in the chicken house, the chickens got necessary exercise going after it. Maybe they do get exercise. But the specialists now say it's more important for poultry to have clean grain, and that scratch feed can be put in hoppers, just as dry mash is given.

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"One of my friends moved out into nearby Maryland not long ago. After she had made sure there was no local ordinance against keeping chickens, she asked me to find out what the government could tell her about managing the dozen hens she proposed to start with.

"Well, the man I consulted in the Bureau of Animal Industry gave me eight Farmers' Bulletins on the subject. And as I believe many farm women like to have their hens confined in a space equivalent to a city backyard, to keep them from scratching up the flower beds, or getting run over by motorists, I'll outline the contents of the bulletin that seemed to me to have everything my friend wanted to know. It was called "Poultry Keeping in Back Yards" and its number is 1508-F.

"One reason for keeping a few chickens, says this publication, is to turn waste into profit. I mean the table scraps which would otherwise find their way to the garbage pail. This reduces the cost of living. Some grain and mash has to be provided for a small flock of chickens, but not so much as when there are no table scraps. The chickens pay their way in eggs, and when there are plenty of eggs in the diet less cash has to be spent for other foods rich in similar food values. So it's an economical circle. Any surplus spring eggs can be put down for winter use.

"First discussed in Farmers' Bulletin 1508-F are the breeds that do well in a small home flock. Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, Wyandottes, Orpingtons, and Australorps are the general-purpose breeds, especially suitable for home poultry raising. All of them lay well and make good table chickens. Then Leghorns, Anconas and Minorcas are good layers, but have a tendency to fly over the fence. One of their wings has to be clipped, or the poultry yard may have to have a very high fence. Finally there are two breeds of very large birds which are fine for roasting and stewing. These are the Brahmas and Jersey Giants. Of course they lay eggs, too, but are especially noted for their meaty qualities. My friend says

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she intends to have some bantams for the children. Bantams are handsome and make nice pets.

"In starting out, the authors of Farmers' Bulletin 1508-F say you can purchase either hatching eggs, day-old chicks, or well-developed pullets. Many inexperienced persons find the last method more convenient than trying to hatch eggs or raise chicks but, if hatching eggs or baby chicks are preferred, get them from a reliable breeder. Success in back-yard poultry keeping is determined to a very large extent by the quality of the original stock.

"The bulletin goes on to tell how to hatch and brood chicks, how to make suitable coops and poultry houses, what to feed the chickens at different stages of their development. In fact, - just how to manage the flock for best results. Let me check over some of the points the amateur must keep in mind:

"Chickens need protein which can be supplied in a mash containing meat food, such as meat scraps. Birds also need more mineral food in proportion to their total food requirements than do most other classes of animals. This is because they have to make eggshells and good skeletons. Oyster and clam shells, broken up, and limestone, supply calcium. Bonemeal furnishes phosphate.

"Another thing usually supplied chickens is grit. As you doubtless know, the food consumed by chickens is ground up in the gizzard. The grit acts much as our teeth do, reducing the chicken's food to digestible particles.

"Experienced poultry raisers supply fresh water every day, and of course, keep the water fountain clean and sanitary. Milk is given to provide protein and minerals. Chickens will take sour skim milk, condensed milk, dried skim milk, and dried buttermilk as well as fresh milk. At some seasons of the year the chickens may need cod-liver oil in their ration.

"These points are just a few of the many to be found in Farmers' Bulletin 1508-F, Poultry Keeping in Back Yards. Other bulletins your listeners may find useful are: Standard Breeds and Varieties of Chickens (two bulletins); Selecting Hens for Egg Production; Farm Poultry Raising; Incubation and Brooding of Chickens; and Poultry Houses and Fixtures. Tell folks to write directly to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for any of these publications they may wish."

That concludes our Washington letter. Perhaps I'd better read that list of bulletins again. (repeat.)

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